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## Carbon monoxide at condos

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By ANNE SCHIEBER

**GRAND RAPIDS** -- Shortly before 9 a.m. Friday, two residents of the Indian Village Condominiums went to the emergency room with flu-like symptoms. Doctors diagnosed them with carbon monoxide poisoning, and immediately called firefighters.



Grand Rapids firefighters arrived at the condominium in the 2200 block of S. Saulk Trail and evacuated all 38 residents. Ambulances arrived and took four other residents, who were sick enough to be transported, to the hospital. Two had passed out, requiring decompression treatment in a hyperbaric chamber.



Many of the residents are elderly and disabled. Because of the rain, the RAPID sent two busses so residents would have a place to stay while the problem was addressed.

Firefighters determined the source of the carbon monoxide was the furnace. Deputy Fire Chief Laura Knapp told 24 Hour News 8, "We had levels up to 1,000. At 50-parts-per-million we want to evacuate."

According to officials at Spectrum Health, about 50 patients every season come in with serious enough carbon monoxide poisoning to require hyperbaric treatment. Doctors said not many people can survive exposure at the level found inside the condos for very long.

A carbon monoxide detector costs around \$30. Also, make sure heating devices are working properly and are well vented.

Common symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are nausea, red skin, vomiting and other flu-like symptoms.

After shutting off the furnace and ventilating the building, residents were allowed to return to their condos.



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**DTE exec tells how a simple device would have saved his son**

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BY ALEJANDRO BODIPO-MEMBA

FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

It seemed like a perfect way to spend the Christmas holiday.

Last December, Richard Lueders and his 26-year-old son, Thomas, flew to the Sunshine State for a few days to check out Coral Gables and Key West. The elder Lueders, a manager with DTE Energy, had spent some time growing up in Florida, and he wanted to share the experience of going home with Thomas, a Boston College grad who was working in Washington, D.C., for a lobbying group.

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"I wanted to show Tom that environment as he had never been there," Richard Lueders recalled last week. "If you don't know it, it's a great boating area. If you've ever been to Mackinac Island, it's kind of like Mackinac but with cars."

But the father-son bonding experience turned tragic on the morning of Dec. 27, when, while staying in Room 416 at the Doubletree Hotel in Key West, both men suffered carbon monoxide poisoning.

Richard Lueders, who was overcome by the fumes and passed out while taking a shower, woke up 14 hours later in a hyperbaric chamber at a hospital 200 miles away. His son, who had been reading a book on one of the beds, lay dead.

What saved the elder Lueders' life was a set of fire alarms that went off around noon on the fourth floor that day. The ruckus led to a hotel manager walking into rooms trying to evacuate guests. He found the Lueders in their room unconscious.

"A few more minutes and I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you," Lueders said last week.

An investigation found that a faulty boiler that was next to the hotel room leaked carbon monoxide. It also was reported that, five days earlier, a family staying in the same hotel room had to be hospitalized for symptoms that resembled carbon monoxide poisoning.

Unlike fire alarms, carbon monoxide detectors were not required to be installed in hotels rooms in Florida. Lueders has been traveling around Michigan and the rest of the country pushing for legislation that would mandate the devices in new residential construction, hotels and other buildings.

"All it would have taken was a \$20 piece of plastic and my son would still be alive," Lueders said, choking back tears.

"The key thing about carbon monoxide poisoning is that it takes away your cognitive ability to reason before you even sense any symptoms. Changing the laws so that more states require use of carbon monoxide detectors will be one of my pursuits for the rest of my life."

Eight months after the death, only nine states and municipalities require carbon monoxide detectors in new residential construction. Michigan is not one of those states.

Contact **ALEJANDRO BODIPO-MEMBA** at 313-222-5008 or [abodipo@freepress.com](mailto:abodipo@freepress.com).

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## **Do What You Can Now to Prevent Carbon Monoxide Fatalities - By Glenn Hasek**

Date: 2007-01-22

Industry: -Bed and Breakfast-Gaming-Hotel- Category: Environmental

Carbon monoxide, a killer, should be the No. 1 indoor air quality issue at your property. Do you have detectors installed in your guestrooms? In other areas? If not, why? How can you truly be a green hotel if you are not doing all you can to protect your guests and staff from this silent, invisible danger?

Hundreds lose their lives each year after having been exposed to carbon monoxide buildup in an enclosed area. Just last month in Key West, Fla., a 26-year-old man lost his life in a guestroom at an upscale hotel. The man's father nearly died as well. He survived after being put on a ventilator.

According to a report in The Miami Herald, authorities concluded that the boiler room, which houses two boilers and two water tanks to heat water for the entire facility, was the source of the deadly fumes. The boiler room was located next to the room where the death occurred. Only six days before the incident, three guests staying in the same room fell sick from carbon monoxide and were taken to a local hospital for treatment.

It is obvious that proper steps were not taken to address the problem. If the hotel had taken the first incident seriously, or had practiced proper preventive maintenance all along, it is very likely that it would not be dealing with the death of a guest, thousands of dollars in lost revenue from being shut down, and a public relations and legal nightmare.

Unfortunately, what happened last month in Florida is not a first for the lodging industry. Guests have died from carbon monoxide in other hotels as well. An Internet search provided numerous examples. In 2005, three women died from carbon monoxide poisoning in a garage at a motel after leaving their car running.

### **How is Carbon Monoxide Produced?**

Carbon monoxide is produced by the incomplete combustion of the fossil fuels-gas, oil, coal and wood-used in boilers, engines, gas fires, water heaters, solid fuel appliances and open fires. Dangerous amounts of carbon monoxide can accumulate as a result of poor installation, poor maintenance, or failure or damage to an appliance in service. It can also build up when rooms are poorly ventilated.

Carbon monoxide has no smell, taste or color. In today's world of improved insulation and double glazing, it has become increasingly important to have good ventilation, maintain all appliances regularly, and to have absolutely reliable detector alarms installed. The alarms should be tested regularly and must provide a visual (for the hearing impaired) and audible warning immediately if there is a buildup of carbon monoxide to dangerous levels.

Don't wait for state or local inspectors to check your facility. They usually have way too many buildings to inspect. Be proactive. Install detectors. Frequently check areas vulnerable to carbon monoxide buildup. Hire a professional if necessary. Implement a preventive maintenance plan so that heating appliances are checked regularly. Make sure obvious areas of vulnerability such as parking garages are well ventilated. Ventilation fans should be working properly. Educate your engineers and housekeepers. Check on your guests and look out for one another.

Accidents do occur but in instances of negligence, hotel owners and operators deserve to be penalized. The family of the victim in Key West and the families of all of the others that have been killed by carbon monoxide poisoning will have to live the rest of their lives without their loved ones. In memory of the victims and with thoughts of their families, do what you have to do to prevent carbon monoxide leaks. You will be very glad that you did.

This article first appeared on the Green Lodging News website. To sign up to receive the weekly Green Lodging News newsletter, go to [www.greenlodgingnews.com](http://www.greenlodgingnews.com). Glenn Hasek can be reached at [greenlodgingnews@aol.com](mailto:greenlodgingnews@aol.com).

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